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ABSTRACT

This is a talk by child psychologist and therapist Lois Barclay Murphy, given at City College, New York, in 1980. The address reviews Ms. Murphy's contributions to child psychology and her study of children's coping strategies. The speech briefly outlines other developments in psychological and sociological study since the 1930s, including the use of intelligence testing to determine children's abilities and the discovery that IQ is not a static phenomenon. Also recounted are Ms. Murphy's experiences as a planner and trainer in Project Head Start. Stressed throughout the talk is the author's opinion that individuals of all ages can grow in intellect and self concept if given stimulation, charged with responsibility, and treated with patience and sympathy. (APM)

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On COPING and CHANGE

Lois Barclay Murphy

The Catherine Molony Memorial Lecture

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CATHERINE MOLONY (1920-1977) was a beloved member of the City College Advisory Service to Open Corridors, a workshop leader at the Workshop Center, and an educator whose idea ideas and research on reading influenced teachers. The Memorial Lecture, an annual event at City College in her honor, was the feature of the second Spring Institute held at the Workshop Center on Saturday, April 26, 1980.

THE WORKSHOP CENTER FOR OPEN EDUCATION serves City College classes, and is a free facility for all teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and parents who are interested and involved in open education in the New York City area.

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Introduction

Harold M. Proshansky

When Lillian Weber asked me to introduce Lois Barclay Murphy as the 1980 Catherine Molony Memorial Lecturer, I said Yes when I really wanted to say No. I recognized that it would be a very emotional situation for me, for I would be introducing not the scholar and researcher of national renown but a friend *and* a friend of a friend, if I may talk of her marriage to Gardner Murphy in that way. And at some points in my life I was as close to the Murphys as I was to blood relations.

But Etta Proshansky doesn't always allow me to say Yes and No. What's more, thanks to her connection with the Workshop Center and Lillian Weber, she reminds me quite often how important and valuable is the work that emanates from both sources.

So it is an honor as well as a deep pleasure for me to be here. This is where it all began for me--across the street in a building named for Townsend Harris. I was doing my first piece of research in the top floor there, and that assignment threatened to cost me the job that I held outside school. I would have quit if it had not been for the intervention of the Murphys. It was Gardner who offered me the check, but I always had the feeling that it was Lois who influenced Gardner. That check helped me stay in college. (I never expected to end up an administrator, but then, life doesn't always turn out the way you want!)

Surely there were no two people who influenced, supported, and cared as much about graduate students and young colleagues as did Lois and Gardner Murphy. But while their names are inevitably linked, I want to make it clear that her work was, and is, separate and distinct--with her

students, in her research, and through her support for people.

When you review her background, you will see there is no way of categorizing it; one can't compartmentalize Lois Barclay Murphy. If you try to describe her as a teacher, or a practitioner, or a researcher, or a writer, or a lecturer--she was all of these. Her productivity has been enormous: ten or eleven books, numerous articles, and most important, participation in an incredible number of activities related to children. (Why I can even recall being a fellow student with her in some course in psychoanalysis!) As extraordinary as the quantity is the quality of her record. It is a record based on a lifelong interest in children and on a belief in an approach to children that was her own approach. It is a record to be proud of.

What makes Dr. Murphy great is her commitment not to producing a great record but to living her values. The remarkable fact is that Lois Barclay Murphy--and Gardner Murphy--lived their values. They lived them in the sense of being dedicated to a problem that needs solution. Her commitment was to the problem of understanding children's development and, more important, doing something about it, not showing off, as psychologists often do with their pretentious models of human behavior--mathematical models, engineering models, whatever--all in the name of outdoing the achievements of the natural sciences.

Lois and Gardner Murphy have been dedicated to people, to ideas, and indeed to understanding. If something didn't fit into some kind of mold or didn't have social acceptance, they considered that was all the more reason to tackle it, to try to understand it. This simple approach also applied to people, even those who may have been slightly peculiar--and I was slightly peculiar. And so, in welcoming Lois Barclay Murphy I

feel I am making some small payment to both the Murphys in return for their great support and their great guidance during a crucial time of my life, for which I'm deeply grateful. In presenting her here today at City College, I'm confident I speak for many, many others whose work has benefited from her wisdom and her courage.

HAROLD M. PROSHANSKY has been engaged in research in environmental psychology, and is President of The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.

On Coping and Change

Lois Barclay Murphy

Before I get started on the topic of the day, I want to say something about the course of my work, which Harold Proshansky so generously reviewed in his Introduction: Along the way I lived through an enormous amount of ridicule.

In the 1930s, there was much research on "aggression and children" and "conflict in children." People were doing short sample studies, counting the number of hits child A gave to child B, without any observations about what led to the hit or the consequences of the hit, or what it was all about. I thought this was wrong; after all, you want to understand something, and counting hits doesn't lead to very much understanding.

Also, we had two children of our own, whom we enjoyed enormously. They had a normal share of aggression, and they were also very sympathetic, very understanding, and a lot of fun. We decided that somebody ought to be studying some other aspects of children. I focused on sympathy, and I was lucky to get the backing of the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, whose first president, Dr. Ludwig Kast, said, "Your idea makes sense to me. Go ahead and do your research and send me the bill."

That was the beginning, but when I went into the nursery school with the idea, the head

teacher, who later became quite a leader in the field, said, "You're crazy. Everybody knows that you can't expect three-year-olds to be sympathetic. You won't get any data. You'll waste your time." Actually I did get data; a few of you who are old enough to have read a book about sympathetic behavior in young children written in the 1930s may remember.

The same thing happened with the idea of studying "coping." I continued to be restless about the amount of pathology that was being described, feeling that we needed to look at how normal children *stay* normal. How do they cope with everyday problems? In 1953, I began the study of coping with the help of an experienced pediatrician, a child psychiatrist, a home visitor, two clinical psychologists, and some graduate student "parallel observers." A site visitor from the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), a brilliant psychologist, John Benjamin, came out to the Menninger Foundation and said, "What do you think you're doing, studying 'coping'?" That term was not in the Psychological Abstracts Index at that time. After a lot of grilling, I got fed up and said, "I *know* that this needs to be studied. We *need* to study how ordinary children cope with their everyday problems. If you don't want to support it, you don't have to. I'll get somebody else to support it." So he went back to NIMH and supported it. In fact, NIMH contributed to the support from 1953 to 1969. The last volume, VULNERABILITY, COPING, & GROWTH, appeared in 1976 after a number of other books and monographs had been published.

One reason why I wanted to give this little bit of background is that there may be young people or people of other ages among you who also see things that need to be done. If your idea is a result of your honest observation, and you know it needs to be done, go ahead and do it. Don't pay any attention to the people who don't understand it, who don't appreciate it. They will in time. Currently a number of studies of prosocial behavior are based on my work of forty years ago.

I was born quite close to the beginning of this century (1902). Thinking about the question of coping and change, I can recall the sequences in the way people have been viewed both in professional terms and in expressions of gut feelings. In the period before and during World War I, the assumption was that human character was fixed. One much-quoted saying--I think it was from a Catholic priest--was: "Give me a child till the age of six, and I'll have him for the rest of his life." People believed that after the age of 30 or 35 or 40, you were over the hill, it was all downhill. As for old age, the feeling was--I think we have to blame Shakespeare for it--"sans eyes, sans ears, sans everything." A frequent expression I heard as a child, which came to mind after I got involved in Head Start, was "poor white trash." It reflected one of the static concepts, and was elaborated with the idea that there were people who were "no good," who had no "gumption," who didn't try to better themselves." Another static idea held that serious defects were not only irreversible but retardation and being crippled meant that there wasn't anything to do but to institutionalize handicapped people. There was no concept of maximizing potentialities.

After Terman developed the intelligence test there was also the belief that the IQ was static. You could get a person's IQ on one test and that was it, that was his label. They proved this by studying thousands of children at successive times and figuring the average of the test scores on those children to see whether IQs changed. The average of course was the result of adding IQs that increased and those that decreased, so it appeared that there was no change. This reliance on the average is to be blamed, I think, for the concept of the stable IQ. Then, too, the stable IQ fitted in with the wishes of psychologists who in the first quarter of the century felt insecure and timid because psychology was a new science and psychologists wanted it to be respected, like physics, for instance. So it was important for them to think in terms of con-

tinuity, high correlations, and predictability. At that time, notions of change and unpredictability and potentiality would have made people very nervous. You simply did not hear ideas like that.

Around 1930, things began to change. At the University of California, at the Fels Institute and in a number of places around the country, longitudinal studies focusing on individuals got underway. As soon as we started to watch the individual child growing up, a different picture emerged. Bayley found, for instance, that IQs of young children changed, and that there was not a good correlation between infancy IQs and the child's IQ at the age of six. Later, longitudinal studies demonstrated differences among children in the amount and direction of change. Motivation, stimulation, stress and other factors contributed to change.

A couple of wonderful, courageous people in Iowa, Drs. Harold Skeels and Marie Skodak, studied what happened to a group of orphanage children when half of them were taken out of the orphanage and put into, of all places, an institution for the retarded. The other half were left in the orphanage, where they sat on seats in a row against the wall, having no stimulation at all--a most depriving environment. They found that the children who were put into the institution for the retarded improved in IQ. The retarded adults had been making pets out of the children, loving them and playing with them. Those children's IQs went up, whereas the IQs of the ones left in the orphanage went down.

This work was vigorously criticized on statistical grounds. But Skeels and Skodak waited patiently until those children were grown up. On a follow-up study they found that the children whose IQs had been increasing became self-supporting, and their own children had IQs of 100, 110, 120. Practically all those children turned out extremely well, and their children did well also. But the children who had grown up in the orphanage remained dependent and institutionalized and a helpless, expensive burden on society.

I feel guilty because in the 1930s I didn't think anyone would pay attention to what I said, but at the Sarah Lawrence Nursery School I was finding parallel results with certain children who came to the nursery school with low IQs of 65 to 85. When we gave them consistent individual support, their IQs went up. One child's IQ of 80 went up to 136; a child tested at 65 actually ended up with an IQ of 147 and graduated from Columbia University. I knew that Skeels and Skodak were sound, but, with the whole establishment against us, I didn't think there was any point in my trying to convince people. I didn't have a statistical study as weapon. So I did not do anything about it at that time, but it did lead me to further study in continuity and change.

Another development was the way in which the Depression of the 1930s was changing successful people to unsuccessful people. Unemployment increased horribly. Those who had been doing very very well were out of jobs and couldn't support their families. Some men sold apples on the street. Some men had to live in box houses in the streets of New York. I used to take my Sarah Lawrence students down to New York to educate them to the needs of the unemployed. Then WPA came along with a work program. Men who had been terribly depressed and discouraged, not knowing how to manage, became able to do more. Instead of defeat, they found they recovered usefulness and self-respect.

In the same period Hartshorne and May at Yale were studying character--this character that was supposed to be so static. They found that the honesty of children depended on the consistency of standards in family, neighborhood, and school. When children were exposed to different values in these different settings, each of which meant so much to them, honesty was much less consistent. In other words, many a child who in one setting is honest, goes along with his pals in another setting where there's a lot of cheating. This study introduced another slant, although it is in line with the dif-

ferent approaches to the influence of the environment on development.

The first era up to the 1930s was a static era but the period I've just described--the 1930s to the 1960s--was an era of questions and challenge. Then studies and experiences were showing us that human organisms are not as static as some of the materials of physics. Granted, we had been learning about relativity and also the dynamics of the universe. For instance, we learned that the earth consists of plates that move and change the shapes of continents; the earth is not as solid and static as we always assumed it was. Gradually we were also beginning to see that people are plastic, responsive to the environment, just as animals and plants are, but even more so because people have the possibility of control of the environments that shape other people and themselves.

Leaving those first two eras and looking at the 1960s to the present, there has been another group of influences. These were the extension of welfare; Head Start and child care centers; a new push toward training the disabled, who were no longer regarded as helpless but as having potentialities; and most recently, support for the at-risk baby and the at-risk mother. Many babies were formerly lost through difficult pregnancies and difficult births. In recent years many more babies were being saved--babies of two pounds or less, babies two or even three months premature. I was involved briefly in consultation about them, visiting some of the at-risk families and observing the progress made with nursing and social work support.

What meant most to me, what was most exciting and moving was my extended experience in Head Start. I worked at several different levels: planning at the national level; training at the national, state, and local levels; spending a morning a week over three years in one Head Start center. I had many interesting experiences. For instance, at a meeting of mothers they said at

first, "We don't want no parent education," and I said, "I don't like parent education either. So let's talk about what you would want." (I meant that I did not like formal, didactic parent education.) They said, "What we really want to know is what to do about poison, how to protect children from poison, and how to help them if they get poisoned." I agreed that we could arrange a meeting on this topic. After that I asked, "What would you like next?" "Well, cosmetics. We would really like to have somebody lecture about cosmetics." I said, "Well, I wouldn't be that person. But we'll get somebody." After that they wanted help on "how to get the most for your money." I said, "I can help you on that. I was the oldest of five children. My father was a poor minister, being paid in chickens and eggs. There was one Christmas when we had an orange in our stockings. I saw and learned what my mother could do getting things in discount houses, mill-end shops, and my father made some of the furniture." We went on and on this way, dealing with the questions that they raised, respecting their choices and their interests.

About six months later they said, "We want to know about how you help the children to grow so good." I had a hard time to keep from laughing, I was so thrilled that they were now asking for what we had wanted to give to help them become more aware of how children's minds develop. We had a session in which we talked about the equipment we had for the children in nursery and what it was for. I showed them different paintings, and how the children painted and how they changed from the beginning of the year when they played with paint, to being able to express what they saw in shapes and forms toward the end of the year. I did the same with blocks and other materials. They were very interested.

I'm talking now about grownups and how grownups can change. I saw some of what would have been called "white trash" in that center. There was one tall, skinny, hungry-looking woman who was disheveled and discouraged. Three years later, when I went back to give a training session this

woman made the most effective, sensitive and fresh observation and comments of all the two hundred people who were there. She was also attractive, neat and well-dressed, and she had become an effective, confident person in Head Start. It was thrilling to see.

Another mother--with five children--was at first very undernourished looking and so were her children. Each of the children had a different father. Three years later she had accepted responsibility on a committee and was saying, "I think I'll settle down and get married. I think I can be somebody." Another woman was even more disorganized than the ones I've mentioned so far. Her little girl Crissy came to school with lice in her hair and grownup panties hanging down below her dress. The mother couldn't dare to come into the Head Start center. She would come to the door and poke her little girl inside and run off. The staff could hardly stand this. They didn't know whether they wanted to have that mother and child in their precious center. One woman on the staff, Josephine, who had not graduated from high school, said, "Well, she is dirty, but she used to be filthy. At least we should give her a chance." I was very much touched by this. Her perception, her understanding--what feeling! We did give her a chance.

There are really two stories here: one about the woman who used to be filthy and one about Josephine. Little Crissy came to Head Start, was bathed, and the lice were cleaned out of her hair. On her birthday we had a party for her. She went home with a lot of presents. The next day her mother came into the Head Start center for the first time and said, "Nobody ever done so much for my little girl before. I want to do something for you." From that time on she would bring in things that she thought the children would enjoy--pine cones that she would pick up on her way, under the trees--things that she could give. That little girl had said one day, "Mr.

Chapman is my daddy this week," which was telling a lot. Later her mother also said, "I'm going to settle down. I'm going to get married. I can be somebody." She was a changed person.

About Josephine: I felt that that degree of insight and effectiveness was a sign of potentiality that needed to be actualized. I said to her, "You've got to finish a high school equivalent and then go on to a local university." Some years later I got a letter from one of the teachers, who had been keeping in touch with me, telling me that Josephine had completed high school equivalency. She went through Washburn University and got an M.A. in special education. She is now teaching special education. That was very, very exciting to me.

Before I review what it was that helped bring about change in these people, I'll give just a few more examples. At a parent-child center in northern Vermont--the Northern Kingdom it's called, a very poor rural area--there was a woman who was terribly suspicious and wouldn't let any one of the staff of the parent health center visit or come anywhere near her baby. The staff person decided the only thing to do was just to be a neighbor. She arranged to go and sit with the woman once a week and talk with her about whatever she was willing to talk about. The staff person did this for eight months. Then one day the mother said, "Would you like to see my baby?" and from then on, things were different. The mother began to cooperate with the parent-child center.

I'd like to give a little bit of background outside of the Head Start and parent-child centers. At one time I visited the New York Training School for girls, a reformatory. The teenagers and young women there were hostile, bitter, frightened. The atmosphere was very grim. They all wore grey seersucker uniforms. Everything was rigid and stereotyped; they were not allowed to talk at meals. They were resentful of the whole place. Any of us would have been too. It happened I was in a position to make a report on this and a few years later I went

back. I found that the superintendent at the time of the first visit had been discharged and a new and gifted, humane woman, Fanny Morse, had come in and turned the place upside down. She had thrown away all the uniforms, had brought pretty materials for the girls to make their own clothes, and arranged classes for them to learn how to sew. She found a farmhouse on the place where they could scrape off the paint and decorate it for a recreation house. In addition she brought Moreno up there for spontaneity training. The whole atmosphere was different. The girls were happy, responsive, eagerly learning, eager to get trained and to go out. This was a real revolution.

Finally, I'll mention just briefly a brain-damaged child, Peggy, who on the neuropsychological test was found to be damaged in 83% of the functions tested. More than that, she had a lot of physiological difficulties. At the age of almost thirteen she was bogged down at second and third grade work, was falling asleep in class, had almost no friends. Although she was expected never to be able to get through high school, she did finish high school, she got nurse's aide training, and she is taking care of babies in a big hospital. She bought a house, she's driving a car. What did we do in therapy? In order to bring her into the world of functioning people, I said, "You have a checkerboard of strengths and weaknesses, and so do I." I mentioned some of my problems. "Let's use the strengths and see what we can do to help the weaknesses." At the end of the two years that I had with her, I asked, "What do you think helped so much? How was it possible to make up four and five years of work in the first couple of years?" "Well, you treated me like a girl, not like some queer person." I had said, "I wish I had had your pretty blonde hair when I was thirteen." I did everything I could to bring her into normal life, into thinking of herself as a whole person.

What makes change possible in the instances described? In Head Start being appointed to a committee, where they were given re-

sponsibility made people feel "like somebody." Being given choices and autonomy helped them to feel respected. With the woman who was so terribly suspicious, it was patience. It was, I thought, like what the wonderful analyst, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann did with some of her sickest patients. She did not make demands; she waited until they were ready to respond. And with the New York Training School, the principle was changing deprivation to gratification, as Skeels and Skodak had done way back in the 1930s with the orphanage children. With Peggy, she went from ridicule and isolation to being accepted. This is much like what certain psychoanalysts have been saying as a result of studies of therapy effects: Supportive treatment is more successful with many patients than some of the analytic work.

What are the goals and efforts that support change? What I've been talking about is building trust, confidence, and self-respect by helping, by having confidence in people, by respecting potentialities. When I think about a movement for change such as Women's Lib, I recognize that it's a big thrust for equality, but I hope equality in respect rather than just equality in competitiveness. Thinking about the "Me" generation, the movement of self-actualization, it seems to me these people try to undo some Victorian inhibitions by training. It's too bad that people have to pay $25, $50, or even $100, just to get to a point of being able to hug, as in some encounter groups. I begin to wonder whether these and other similar approaches are necessary to counteract the distancing effect of technology.

I have the feeling that self-actualization will be self-defeating, unless it actualizes sharing and giving. If we give, some will want to give; if we respect, others will respect themselves. If we give responsibility, they may feel they "can be somebody." Finally, we are the environment of each other. We can be polluting or fertilizing or stimulating, and help each other grow new selves.

LOIS BARCLAY MURPHY, child psychologist and therapist, taught nursery school teachers at Sarah Lawrence College, directed developmental studies at the Menninger Foundation, and most recently, served as research consultant at the Children's Hospital of Washington, D.C. She is the author of many books, including THE WIDENING WORLD OF CHILDHOOD *and, with Alice E. Moriarty,* VULNERABILITY, COPING & GROWTH: FROM INFANCY TO ADOLESCENCE (*Yale University Press*).

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